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FRAMING EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN WESTERN EUROPE¹

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ABSTRACT

During the last decades, frame analysis has become a preferred concept in political communication to understand underlying beliefs and motives in public conflicts. The study of conflicts on labor market reforms even longer is of pivotal concern for several other social science sub-disciplines, e.g., the research on the welfare state or neo-corporatist institutions. However, it is astonishing that there not more attempts to analyze the framing processes driving the politics of employment relations. Starting from the assumptions that the study of framing can reveal a lot about the dynamics of political struggles on employment relations, this paper explores whether frame patterns follow distinct historic legacies of the single countries, or whether framing is a function of the core beliefs of the relevant actors in the debate on employment relations (public authorities, interest associations, parties and business organizations). The analysis relies on newspaper content analysis data collected from 2004 until 2006 in the U.K., France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria. A first finding is that the framing of employment relations varies across countries mainly as expected by the comparative political economy literature. Furthermore, the results show that a simple bifurcation between left and right is not enough to explain framing differences among actors with regard to employment relations, but that the actors additionally have to be discerned between mainstream and challengers.

KEYWORDS

Framing, Employment Relations, Labor Market Reforms, Interest Intermediation, Content Analysis, Western Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Policy making is a process of social learning, in which conflicts on ideas and values play a crucial role (Hall, 1993). In today's established democracy, these ideational conflicts are increasingly carried out in mass-mediated public debates, making them the crucial arena for social learning (Sniderman, 2000, p. 75). In this paper, we will discover the role of ideas and values in the public debate on employment relations by means of a frame analysis of newspaper articles in six Western European countries (the U.K., France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria). Frames have become a crucial tool to understand the underlying mechanisms shaping ideas in public debates and thus politics in general (Scheff, 2005) and we have strong evidence of the importance of frames in opinion formation processes in policy domains as diverse as immigration, abortion, welfare, or europeanization (Ferree et al., 2002; Medrano, 2003; Helbling et al. 2010, Chong and Druckmann 2007).

Since there is little known about the framing of employment relations, we will consider in the following why actors and countries differ in framing conflicts over labor market issues. Ultimately, this allows revealing how ideologies are integrated into everyday political conflicts on labor market policies and the surrounding institutional agreements (Kriesi et al. 2012). This analysis explores the impact of path dependency and actor characteristics on the use of specific frames to justify positions on labor market issues. On the one hand, we start from an institutionalist's perspective and ask whether and how national peculiarities shape the competition for the dominant framing of employment relations. In establishing the linkage between institutions and the arguments used, the analysis thus reveals how the debate climate in different countries does systematically vary according to the historical development of the labor market regimes. On the other hand, this analysis scrutinizes which actors mobilize which particular problem definition they relate to which policy position. Instead of simply pitting policy positions of actors against each other, we may better understand why and how

employment relation reforms are criticized by analyzing the political actors' reasoning about them.

These questions will be addressed by focusing on the public arena as it is reflected by the sum of public communications related to employment relations (see, Helbling et al., 2011). We use the terms labor market issues and employment relations synonymously and define them in a fairly broad way as “all the behaviours, outcomes, practices, and institutions that emanate from or impinge on the [employment] relationship” (Kaufman, 2004, p. 45). More precisely, we assume that employment relations comprise the specific labor market policies such as wage agreements as well as the institutional settings where these policies are negotiated, decided, and implemented such as collective bargaining sites. Accordingly, the public debate on employment relations involves the communication process of a multitude of actors which relates to these policies and institutions.

Already before the recent global economic meltdown, labor markets came to the fore in Western Europe. In the beginning of the 21st century, for instance, both the French and German governments similarly tried to introduce broad labor market reforms. While the German government managed to implement the *Agenda 2010* reform in 2003 despite fierce protests from the radical left and unions, the French government withdrew its reform, the *Contrat Première Embauché*, in view of the conflicts with the labor movement in 2006. Moreover, the 2005 *Bolkestein directive*, the attempt to liberalize the service sector within the Single European Market, was heavily criticized by the left to trigger a race to the bottom with regards to labor market regulations.

The country sample pits the three biggest European economies, i.e. France, Germany and the U.K., against the three small Western European countries Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Austria. The three big economies have a pivotal role in the European economy which is manifest in the fact that, taken together, they are responsible for half of the European

Union's gross domestic product (IMF, 2010). Beyond their pure economic strength, these countries differ with respect to their historical pathways of economic development. The three small economies, on the other hand, represent the group of coordinated, adaptive, and successful Western European economies with a small workforce and high export market dependency (see, Katzenstein, 1985).

FRAMING EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Frames are “central organizing ideas that provide coherence to a designated set of idea elements” (Ferree et al., 2002, p. 105). In a more instrumental perspective, frames serve as cognitive cues indicating agreement on basic principles and linking specific policy positions to collective beliefs and values (Surel, 2000; Helbling et al. 2011). Thus, by using a frame, a political actor clarifies how he defines a problem surrounding an issue and what its causal interpretation should be (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The mechanism of competition for the prevailing frame among political actors is conceptualized in manyfold ways in the literature: as framing, priming, second-order agenda setting, or second-level agenda setting (Weaver 2007; Kioussis et al., 2006; Ferree et al., 2002; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, p. 63). Yet, all of these concepts share the central notion that the perceived importance of specific interpretations is crucial to the outcome of opinion making processes (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 115). Thus, we will examine the frames actors employ to manipulate the importance of specific aspects with respect to labor market issues.² Moreover, the actors' framing has to be consistent with their core ideologies, since they need to establish a sustainable credibility in the public debate.

As Entman (2004, p. 14) specifies, the most successful frames are those “fully congruent with schemas habitually used by most members of society”. With respect to employment relations in Western Europe, this resonance with central societal themes is most likely

² Since the focus lies solely on the framing by the political elite, framing effects (i.e., how framing influences individuals' attitudes; see, Brewer & Gross 2005) and journalistic framing (i.e., how messages are selected and reinterpreted by the media; see, Matthes 2007) are not considered in this contribution.

achieved by the pivotal ideologies that shaped the political economy since the beginnings of the modern state (Gartzke, 2007; Surel, 2000, p. 169f.). Table 1 presents these themes as derived from the three historically dominant schools of thought: liberalism, mercantilism and socialism. While social democratic and liberal frames have been identified by previous accounts of framing processes related to economic issues (see, Chong and Druckmann, 2007), this analysis adds the mercantilist arguments to the frames available to justify labor market issues. As will be discussed, mercantilist ideas were developed historically independent from social democratic and liberal ideas and are sometimes cross-cutting these two schools of thought.

[table 1 about here]

Systematic accounts of political economic thought started in seventeenth and eighteenth century U.K. (Skousen, 2001), since “the growth of a market society in the early nineteenth century was driven by the ideology of liberalism that found expression in [...] market discourse as the ‘common sense’ of the emerging capitalist system.” (Tarrow and Caporaso, 2009, p. 595f.). The regulatory program of economic liberalism allowed to release the European economies from the formerly prevailing mercantilist structures (Pressman, 2006). Later on, the liberal core belief that free markets are the natural way to organize an economy was succumbed to the Social Democratic compromise after the disastrous experiences of the Great Depression.

Sketched in very bold strokes, the *liberal* paradigm stands out by two central ideas which are listed as “economic freedom” and “prosperity” in table 1. On the one hand, its inherent notion of economic liberty justifies both the emphasis of property rights and individual freedom as a basic human need (Kitschelt, 1994). On the other hand, classical liberalism stands out by the emphasis of prosperity: if individuals strive for success, the whole society profits through the efficient allocation of resources by market mechanisms.

Liberalism was progressive with respect to its questioning of the *mercantilist paradigm* in pre-industrial Europe (Magnusson, 2003). Mercantilist doctrines started from the view that trade among nations is a zero-sum game and that states had to protect the own economy at the expenses of others (Ekelund and Tollison, 1982). In the nineteenth century, mercantilist theories were modified to comprehensive approaches regarding the role of the state in the economy. Reinvented as neomercantilism, it became the theory of state dirigisme by which territorial entities achieve economic wealth and political power (Immerwahr, 2009). Today, these ideas are still virulent in demands for the establishment of state-industrial complexes in strategic markets. The label “intervention” subsumes these ideas in the classification of table 1. Furthermore, neomercantilist thinking is also influential for regionalist approaches in international politics such as the justification of a common trade policy for the European Union (Hurrell, 1995; van Apeldoorn, 2002). This emphasis of a regional or national interest is described by the second neomercantilist category (“protection”) in table 1.

While classical liberalism tried to overcome mercantilist ideas, it itself got challenged from several influential *leftist* movements, ranging from revolutionary anarchists to moderate socialists (Pressman, 2006; King 2003; Lichtheim, 1969). In Western Europe, this thinking became embedded into the democratic system, manifest in the postwar compromise between labor and capital and the implementation of “social protections created to guard against the depredations that markets might cause” (Tarrow and Caporaso, 2009, p. 598). Accordingly, the main focus of social democratic ideas in Western European lies on correctives for the main flaws of capitalism: social protection from the most acute hardships and respect of basic human rights beyond economic imperatives (“social justice” and “fairness” in table 1).

HOW TO EXPLAIN THE USE OF FRAMES

To explain the use of frames, we propose to test theoretical arguments at two different levels. In a first step we will explore whether the framing of employment relations depends on the specific national contexts. To this aim, we consider hypotheses derived from a model of *national divergence*, which explains national framing differences recurring to distinct historical pathways of coordination and regulation at the country level. Along with the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) and welfare state regime literature, we therefore suppose that framing depends on the national ideological imprint (Esping-Andersen 1998; Huber et al. 1993; Huber and Stephens 2001).

We also take an actor-specific perspective and argue that differences in frame use can be explained by actor characteristics. Since the public is exposed to and chooses among competing frames, actors are trying to influence which key organizing ideas are used for the evaluation of specific issues (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Kriesi et al., 2009). Furthermore, we assume that actors employ frames in accordance with underlying structural potentials of the debate, i.e., they choose frames suited to their need to address specific interests such as the parties' constituencies. We will therefore distinguish between left-right ideological positions and the divide between winners and losers which has emerged in consequence of post-industrialisation and globalization (Kriesi et al. 2008; see also Keohane and Milner 1996).

We will test all expected differences against the often found evidence of a policy change dominated by economically liberal ideas in Western European politics on employment relations which leads to an overall convergence of labour market regimes (Clayton and Pontusson, 1998; Rhodes, 2001; Regini, 2003; Streeck, 2006; Vail, 2008; Baccaro and Simoni, 2008). That means we assume liberal frames to prevail in the debates but nevertheless expect framing patterns to systematically vary as a function of country or actor characteristics.

THE DIVERGENCE MODEL

Many influential theoretical frameworks in comparative political economy put the *divergent path* thesis forward, a fundamental proposition being that differences among countries are persistent (Kitschelt, 1999, p. 444; Hays 2009, Hall and Soskice, 2001). In contrast, much of the early research on globalization and post-industrialization contest this claim, arguing that market internationalization is forcing advanced economies to converge onto a single neoliberal model (e.g., Moses, 1994). A similar argument with respect to labour market policies was made by Jessop (1993), who argues that labour markets in Europe are continuously reshaped towards a workfare model. Inspired primarily by the U.S.A., countries would converge as a consequence of the diffusion of the neoliberal policies according to which unemployment is primary a behavioural problem and hence should be corrected by negative incentives (sanctions). Yet, also more recent accounts of institutional change emphasize that there is a tendency to overstate the extent of continuous reproduction of existing institutional differences (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). The literature is thus far from an agreement how resilient institutional configurations are, i.e. how strongly path dependency keeps advanced economies on diverging paths.

Among the many conceptualizations of political-economic arrangements, an important attempt is the *Varieties of Capitalism* (VoC) approach, distinguishing, first, the Liberal market economies (LME) and second, the Coordinated market economies (CME) (Hall and Soskice 2001; Hancké, Rhodes, and Thatcher, 2007). Whereas in LME like the U.K. the economic players coordinate by means of competitive and hierarchical market arrangements, in CME the coordination of economic activities – for instance, industrial relations, security of employment, investor relations, or inter-firm negotiations – are based on non-market mechanisms such as tripartite concertation.

The strength of the VoC approach lies in the acknowledgment of the importance, not only of the political, but also of the economic stakeholders within this policy domain. However, it fails to acknowledge the role of the state in regulating and stabilizing the coordination mechanisms in labor market regimes adequately. Thus, this central player is re-introduced by Schmidt (2009), whose theoretical framework shows that the nature of state intervention is able to capture and explain part of the divergence among CEMs countries. In Schmidt complement the VoC literature by including another distinction, the so-called *State-Influenced Market Economies* (SME), the government and administrations play a dominant role and influences the employment relations and the coordination efforts between the economic and the social partners, i.e. unions, employers and the state. A good example for SME countries is France, which is characterized by a centralized and autonomous, i.e., *strong*, state in Badie and Birnbaum's (1983) understanding. In France, employment relations are heavily determined by state intervention and regulation. On the contrary, for instance in Germany or the Netherlands, these coordination activities base foremost on a horizontally structured mutual agreement system and rely on a non-hierarchical power conception.

This additional distinction within CME is pivotal to understand how much consensus within the political elite is required for the implementation of specific policy proposals. In fact, it can be expected that decision-making and implementation processes in France are characterized by a higher degree of centralization, and hence less public discussion develops as the state has, if necessary, the power to enforce policies unilaterally (Baccaro and Sang-Hoon 2007; Ferrera and Gualmini 2004; Regini and Regalia 1997; Molina and Rhodes 2007). Thus, in France, modernization strategies traditionally relied on major industrial projects with far-reaching state intervention (Thibergien 2007).

From the four remaining CME, the Netherlands and Switzerland can be further separated (Visser and Afonso: 2010). Similar to other continental European economies, the Nether-

lands and Switzerland face high wage floors and fixed labor costs but – as outliers – did not experience sharply rising unemployment during the 1990s (Iversen and Cusack 2000). To achieve this, both countries have relied on a relatively flexible labor market to compensate for economic difficulties by extending part-time and temporary employment (Visser and Hemerjick 1997; Bonoli and Mach 2000). Moreover, in contrast to other CME, labor movements traditionally play a subordinate role and business interests are dominated by the large export-oriented companies (Katzenstein 1985). It is therefore expected that Switzerland and the Netherlands represent a liberal leaning variation of the general continental political economies (Schnyder and Heemskerk, 2008).

The institutional differences in collective bargaining, business relationships, and state intervention can be expected to influence the way different frames are used in the debate on employment relations. In other words, this relates to the often-raised claim that values and norms have a different substantial meaning among countries (Medrano 2003). In Austria and Germany, and most pronounced in France, we can expect social democratic and protectionist ideas to be more strongly engraved in the national public spheres. Social and national protection should thus more forcefully enter the debate on labor market deregulation. In the U.K. and a bit less in Switzerland and the Netherlands, by contrast, we should expect that the tone of the debate should be more heavily leaning to liberal frames highlighting the necessity for deregulation.

POLITICAL ACTORS' PREFERENCES

Beside the influence of the national context on the overall framing of labor market debates, we also expect the framing strategies to diverge between different interest representatives. However, before the framing strategies are explored, it has to be clarified which actor types inhabit the debate on employment relations, since a simplification of the multitude of statements by conflating them to actor types heavily preconditions the interpretation of empir-

ical findings. Table 3 lists the actor types and how they will be used in the analyses.

[table 4 about here]

The classification starts with the very broad distinction between public authority actors, interest groups, parties, and corporations. The public authority actors include international governmental organizations like the World Trade Organization, European Union actors, as well as administrative bodies. Interest groups are divided into trade unions and employer associations. The latter category also comprises the professional organizations, which had too few statements to be collapsed into an own category. With respect to the trade unions, private sector unions (including peak unions) are distinguished from public sector unions. This follows our theoretical argumentation regarding the different preferences on the left, since we expect that public sector unions more follow a strategy to defend the losers. In a similar vein, peak employer associations and white collar organizations, which are expected to pursue a mainstream strategy, are separated from small business associations and farmer organizations. Corporations, finally, are differentiated into public enterprises and multinational corporations.

Depending on the political constituency whose interests they represent, these actors can be expected to raise and use different frames. More specifically, we argue that the structure of political debates on employment relations entails two political divides shaping the patterns justifications. To begin with, the traditional left-right divide can be expected to have retained important explanatory power. Even though many scholars argue that it has developed merely into a valence issue (Dalton et al. 1984, Kitschelt 1994, Hardin 2000), it is evident that the ideological antagonism between labor and capital still divides today's politics at least to some extent (Pontusson and Rueda 2010). Apart from the opposition between state and market this divide concerns also the characteristics of de-commodification³ policies, and split labor, i.e.

³ Esping-Anderson (1998) defines de-commodification as social policies, which were adopted by the welfare states to ensure workers' pay against traditional risks, i.e. sickness, injury and unemployment. Hence, de-

unions, left parties and public interest groups (social movements and charity organizations), favoring highly redistributive policies, and capital, i.e. right parties, employer's organizations and international firms, which prefer means tested benefit structures (Esping-Andersen 1998 and 1996).

However, since the ideological left-right conflict is not as encompassing as it once was, it gets cross-cut by a more recent divide which emerged in consequence to far-reaching socio-economic transformations such as globalization⁴ and post-industrialization⁵ (Bonoli 2005 and 2006, Häusermann 2010, Kriesi et al. 2008; Esping-Anderson 2009). In brief, the labor-market related interests of the economic winners of the last few decades are pitted against the needs of the losers. The decisive political dilemma for the politics of employment relations lies between claims for more deregulation and liberalization of the national economy to sustain the winners benefits and the increase of social and national protective policy solutions to shelter the losers.

Hence, as a consequence to these major structural shifts, we can expect that economic preferences have become more complex within the left as well as the right block (Häusermann 2009; Fossati 2011). Following Kriesi et al. (2006 and 2008: 4-5), economic winners are best conceptualized as having sufficient *exit options* in terms of their employment situation. The pivotal determinant is the level of marketable skills, since a high *educational* attainment guarantees an individuals' successful economic mobility even in highly flexible and internationalized labor markets (Oesch 2006). These marketable skills, which are captured in the case of Schwander and Häusermann (2009) by *occupational profiles*, allow to capture stable political preferences. Occupational profiles can be seen as a composite concept of the

commodifying policies were introduced to decrease the dependence of employees and their families from the (labor) market (Schwartz 2001).

⁴ Understood as the increase in cultural diversity, political integration, and the cross-border flows of trade, services and capital (Held et al. 1999).

⁵ Defined as the upswing of the tertiary sector, the encompassing entry of women into the workforce, and the mounting pressure on the welfare state in an era of "permanent austerity", i.e. demographic aging combined with slow economic growth (Pierson 1996 and 2001).

individuals' employment status derived from the skill-level, the protection guaranteed by work contracts, and the work logic of jobs (see Oesch 2006).⁶ Mainstream actors represent the winners. Overall, as defined by the combination or of all three characteristics capturing the occupational profiles these will thus favor further deregulation and employ a mainly liberal framing strategy. Challengers, in contrast, resort to protectionist and social democratic frames to justify policy measures that shelter the losers. Depending on the country and time-specific context, some actors of course can change their strategy from mainstream to challenging, as it for example is the case with social democratic parties (Rueda 2006). The distinctions of a political left and right as well as a mainstream and its challengers leads to four ideal-typical framing strategies which constitute the expectations for the actor-related analyses (see table 2).

[table 2 about here]

Pursuing the flexicurity approach, left mainstream actors are expected to mobilize ideologically left-oriented but high skilled winners. Thus, these actors can be expected to favor more flexible labor market measures, if an effective social security net can be maintained. Social investment policies such as activation schemes or education promoting measures are the preferred means by these actors to which the third-way social democratic parties and public sector unions are expected to belong.

The second category summarizes traditional left approaches, which have in common that they try to protect the economic losers by means of strict de-commodifying measures and protectionist economic policies. Private sector unions, public interest groups (charities and alter-globalization movements), as well as communist and radical socialist parties are expected to use this framing strategy.

⁶ Oesch (2006) distinguishes between four different work logics: self-employed, technical, organizational or interpersonal service.

Third, the neoliberal strategy should be preferred by representatives of economic winners which lean to the political right, which includes peak employers associations, liberal and Christian democratic/Conservative parties, multinational corporations as well as experts. Their constituency mainly entails high-skilled employees working in internationalized branches. Accordingly, this group opposes redistribution and costly welfare state measures, while it is in favor of enhancing competitiveness by means of *laissez faire* solutions, i.e. liberal frames in combination with a strong preference for deregulation should be characteristic for these actors. In line with their constant push to deepen the European Single Market, we further expect public administrations, EU and IGO actors as well as public enterprises using preferably this framing strategy (Lehmkuhl 2006: 149, Howarth, 2006; Thatcher, 2007).

Finally, we have a protectionist framing strategy, which is characterized by a right-oriented ideological stance and a tendency to protect the national losers from the effects of globalizing labor markets. This kind of policy solutions are generally characterized by social policy measures relying on strict deservingness criteria and means-tested benefits. Small business associations and radical populist parties are anticipated to pursue the strategy to combine a protectionist but at the same time liberal framing strategy.

DESIGNING THE INQUIRY

In order to get a comprehensive picture of the framing on employment relations, a comparative newspaper content analysis was conducted in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the U.K.⁷ These six economies allow us to study the impact of a variety of historical pathways of economic development. The analyses rely on data from quality newspapers, detailing the frames employed in employment relations over the three years from 2004 to 2006. The newspapers include *Le Monde* (F), *The Times* (GB), the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (D), the *NRC Handelsblad* (NL), *Die Presse* (A) and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (CH).

⁷ This content analysis data set was established by the author and his collaborators in the research project *National Political Change in a Globalizing World* (see Kriesi et al., 2008).

Given the fact that, due to the heavy workload of content analyses, only one media title could be considered, quality newspapers were chosen for conceptual reasons since they are particularly suitable to study public debates. They remain the leading medium of political coverage. And, in this role, quality newspapers both report the debates in the most detailed manner and influence the editorial decisions of a wide range of other news organizations (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008; Reinemann, 2003).

The single instances of framing were identified using the Core Sentence Approach (CSA). If a policy statement of a relevant actor is found in a text segment, this segment is reduced to its most basic structure (a *core sentence*) that contains only the subject (*actor*), the object (*issue*), the direction of the relationship between subject and object (*polarity*), and the justification(s) of the relationship (frame(s)). The polarity is always quantified using a scale ranging from -1 to +1, where -1 means opposition and 1 means support of economic liberalization, with three intermediary positions indicating a vague or ambiguous relationship. By frames, the problem definition an actor gives when taking a policy position is meant. Since actors regularly back their policy positions in public debates with multiple frames (Lerch and Schwellnus, 2006, p. 307), the coding of up to five frames per core sentence was allowed. The example in Table 2 illustrates the coding procedure. This core sentence refers to Blair's support of unspecific labor market reforms, which is complemented by a social protection frame ("in order to tackle record unemployment") as well as a prosperity frame ("in order to tackle [...] sluggish growth").

[table 3 about here]

To reduce the effort of time and costs, a two-step sampling strategy was performed: First, the relevant events in each country were identified using various yearbooks (Keesing's World Record of Events, Facts on File World News Digest Yearbook etc.) as well as the annual reviews of the newspapers in our sample. These lists formed the basis for an extensive

keyword list for each country, helping us to electronically find potentially relevant articles in the newspaper databases. Second, a chronological sample of approximately the same number of articles per country was drawn. A chronological sampling tracks the frequency distribution of relevant articles and therefore captures the peaks and troughs in the debate. Subsequently, given the still time-consuming coding procedure, at most the first twenty core sentences of each article were coded. In sum, the data collection yielded a total of 2021 frames, which were aggregated to the six frame categories as illustrated by table A.1 in the appendix.

Comparisons of these CSA data with data from expert judgments, party manifesto codings, and mass surveys, suggest that the external validity is given (Helbling and Tresch, 2011). Furthermore, the data source are solely editorial articles. In contrast to paid media content, op-eds and letters to the editor, the central aspect of these documents is the processing of information. And since the coding procedure only allows the annotation of the pure actor statements, the bias induced by the journalistic processing of the information was further curtailed.

THE STRUCTURE OF FRAMING ON EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

To provide a broad overview of the content analysis data, table 5 shows the frame emphasis and frame polarities with respect to the public debate on labor market issues. On the one hand, the table indicates the overall distribution of both the higher level and fine-grained frame categories in percentages (frame emphasis). This shows which frames are preferred to justify statements related to employment relations. On the other hand, the overall direction for the different frame categories is indicated (frame polarity). Frame polarities show whether a frame is predominantly used with supporting or opposing statements with regards to *labor market reforms*. A positive polarity always means support for more deregulation, i.e. policies that induce a liberalization of employment relation or a privatization of labor market institutions.

Note that the frame emphasis and polarity are always calculated using article weights. This accounts for imbalances caused by the selection of articles. In fact, the CSA data, i.e., core sentence statements derived from newspaper articles, statistically behave like survey data sampled at two levels, e.g., the country and individual level. In such data sets, the basic assumption of equal chances for individuals or statements to get into the sample is violated because the countries have different population sizes and the articles contain different numbers of core sentences.⁸ Thus, the data need to be aggregated using probability weights on the level of articles.

[table 5 about here]

As far as the emphasis is concerned, liberal frames are clearly most often used as arguments to justify statements on labor market policies. With 46 percentage points they account for almost half of all frames. More precisely, prosperity related frames are the most important category with a relative frequency of 36 percentage points. Social democratic frames amount to about one third of all frames used. Especially social security related arguments are heavily used with 27.3 percentage points. The use of these rather pragmatic frames clearly outstrips the more universalistic arguments related to economic fairness. Neomercantilist justifications are somewhat less important, making up for 19.8 percent of all frames. Here, the frequency of using arguments related to intervention and protection is roughly equal.

Turning to the polarity of the frames used in the debate on labor market issues, the total polarity indicates that the overall climate over all countries reflects support of deregulation (+0.11). While prosperity, protection, and, a bit less, intervention are clearly used with statements in favor of more flexible labor markets (+0.35, +0.30, and +0.15, respectively), justifications pointing to economic freedom have a positive polarity so close to zero that a the direc-

⁸ To illustrate the implications, one can assume an actor with ten statements which all stem from the same article. This salience is easily achieved if an article reports only a little bit more detailed about this actor's position. Further, let's assume a second actor with ten statements, but this time from ten different articles. These ten statements should be given more weight since the actor appeared at very different events.

tion should not be interpreted at all. A polarity of 0.04 means that positive and negative statements almost cancel each other out and the actors are merely ambivalent with respect to this frame category. Fairness and social security, by contrast, are heavily connected to the opposition of labor market deregulation (−0.23 and −0.18). Both social democratic frame categories thus countervail the distinctly positive polarities related to prosperity and protection frames.

HOW FRAME POLARITIES ALIGN

After this descriptive overview on the overall distribution of frames, the analysis proceeds with the question of how the actors' frame polarities are structured into underlying dimensions of the frame competition on employment relations. To this aim, a factor analysis was applied on the frame polarities as calculated over the 14 actor categories and six countries. This yields a potential number of observations of 84. Yet, since not all combinations are present in the data and actors with less than five statements were not considered, the final number of observations is 61. On this data, the eigenvalue test as well as the parallel analysis in figure A.1 (appendix) both indicate a two-factor solution as optimal representation of the structure of the frame polarities, which is shown in table 6.

[table 6 about here]

The polarities of the two liberal frames load higher on the first factor (highlighted in bold), which therefore can be regarded as conflict dimension separating actors emphasizing *economic growth* as priority with respect to employment relations. Yet not only free market framing strategies—prosperity with 0.31 and economic freedom with 0.54—, but also the framing related to state-led development strategies align on this dimension, since intervention has a higher factor loading here as well (0.76). The second factor is build around the combination of social democratic frames and protectionist justifications. Fairness has a factor loading of 0.56, social security loads with 0.68, and slightly less clear, protection is located with 0.24 on

this dimension. Since the common denominator of these three categories is protection—in a social or territorial sense—the dimension is named *securing*. Yet this also means that the traditional left and protectionist framing approaches are not really distinct from each other, since their anticipated dominant framing strategies actually coincide.

The following analyses build on the results of the factor analysis. More precisely, the factor scores of the actors or their emphasis of the two dimensions will be used to explore the framing strategies in detail.

FRAME EMPHASIS BY ACTORS AND COUNTRIES

Frame polarities are only one important indicator for the actors' framing strategy. Besides the use of the different frame categories for the justification of support and opposition to labor market deregulation, it is further crucial how the actors emphasize frames. This strategic aspect involves the manipulation of the salience of specific frames in order to shape the meaning of employment relation policies. Figure 1 shows the frame emphasis of the actors on the securing dimension in decreasing and the growth dimensions in increasing order. While the thick lines indicate the median, the boxes indicate the distance between the lower and upper quartile of the respective actor's frame emphasis. On the one hand, this allows to interpret the consistence of the actors, i.e. the length of the plots show how much the single actors differ from each other in the single countries. On the other hand, the position of the median points to the general emphasis strategy of this actor.

[figure 1 about here]

Many left actors clearly insist on securing. Communists/radical socialists, private sector unions, and public interest groups substantially lean to the emphasis of securing frames. The public sector unions, social democrats, however, show a more balanced frame emphasis strategy since their median frame use is located close to 0.5 and the boxplots are not substantively skewed towards one direction. This gets confirmed by the regression coefficients for the actor

categories with respect to the emphasis of securing (table A.2 in the appendix), which exactly reveal the actors that use securing more often and can thus be perceived as challengers. Communists/radical socialists, private and public sector unions, public interest groups, as well as small business associations all significantly deviate from public administrations. The left challengers, who represent the interests of the losers, insist on securing are thus reinforced by the small business associations, an actor which was expected to be protectionist.

As for the remaining actors, the experts and the Christian democrats/conservatives show a similar, heterogeneous pattern of their frame emphasis. The single country actors of this category are widely distributed, as the spread out boxplots indicate. More consistent are the two types of corporations included into the analyses (multinational corporations and public enterprises), the peak employer associations, the liberal and right wing populist parties as well as the public authorities (IGO and EU actors as well as public administrations). These actors share a rather consistent emphasis of growth related frames and hence by tendency represent the winners. This was mostly expected, except for the radical populist right, which do not stress economic protection but according to Kitschelt's "winning formula" is rather expected to support liberal frames. The present result might hence be due to the salience of the Swiss People's Party (SVP), which traditionally deviates from other right-wing populists with respect to its economic liberalism. Since the SVP is the only radical populist party besides the Austrian Alliance for the Future and Freedom Party, this probably shifts the frame emphasis of this actor category to insistence of growth.

Figure 2 shows the same measure for the countries as figure 1 for the actors. The boxplots indicate the distribution of the respective actors in a country in terms of the emphasis of the two dimensions. Obviously, there is only one value for the European and international level, since all statements of IGO and EU actors were combined. Besides the European and international level, the U.K. strongly emphasizes growth. Table A.2 in the appendix addition-

ally shows that only the actors in the U.K. significantly deviate by their lower emphasis of securing and, correspondingly, a stronger insistence on economic growth. As expected, the U.K. thus stands out in terms of the general framing patterns.

[figure 2 about here]

The distributions in Germany and Austria, although the median values heavily differ, resemble each other in being stretched out on the whole spectrum. In these two countries, actors therefore differ most in terms of frame emphasis. Switzerland and the Netherlands, which were anticipated to be rather liberal-leaning countries in the country sample of the study, are indeed characterized by a median which is above 0.5 for the emphasis of economic growth and a distribution which clearly leans to the right of the graph. France, in contrast, leans to the emphasis of securing, both with respect to the distribution and the median of the actors' frame emphasis. In sum, the country differences with regard to the emphasis of different aspects on employment relations—with the exception of Austria—reflect the expectations.

WHICH ACTORS SHARE THEIR FRAME USAGE?

The remaining analysis combines frame polarities and frame emphasis to identify specific frame usage by the actors in the public debate on employment relations. More precisely, figure 4 presents the results of a cluster analysis on the factor loadings as well as the relative frequency of the two frame dimensions for the identified clusters. First, the appropriate number of clusters was chosen according to the sum of squares within the groups of different cluster solutions (see figure A.2 in the appendix). After the five cluster model, which was chosen, the sum of squares decelerate markedly. Second, the average factor loadings for the five clusters are indicated by the coordinates of the pie chart centers. Third, the relative importance of the five clusters in terms of statements made in the debate is shown by the size of the pie charts, whose sectors present the ratio between frames related to growing (white) and securing (grey), respectively. The affiliation of the single actors to the clusters, finally, is indicated in

table A.3 in the appendix.

[figure 4 about here]

First, two clusters (one and five) can be identified that resemble each other in terms of frame polarities but differ with regards their frame emphasis. The difference in terms of frame emphasis is explained by the fact that in the fifth cluster, exclusively leftist actors are present, which leads to a high share of securing frames. The first cluster, by contrast, encompasses actors from both the left and right, which rises the share of growth frames. Both cluster use securing and growth frames in combination with support of labor market deregulation, which can be perceived as pursuing a flexicurity approach. As expected, these clusters, among others, entail the Swiss, German, and Dutch social democrats (see table A.3) and the public sector unions from Austria, France, and Switzerland. Yet, also actors who were expected to apply a neoliberal framing strategy belong to these clusters, for example, the multinational corporations in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, the Christian democrats/conservatives in Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.K., as well as the public enterprises from the Netherlands and the U.K. Flexicurity thus seems to be the preferred approach, not only for the mainstream left, but also for a big part of the mainstream right. But also the private sector unions in Switzerland and the U.K., hypothesized as traditional leftist, and the small business associations in Austria and Switzerland, anticipated as protectionists, belong to these two clusters.

The fourth cluster is the second biggest in terms of statements in the debate, but only a restricted number of actors is affiliated to it. This cluster uses securing with a negative connotation but growth with a positive polarity. Together with the strong emphasis of growth related aspects, this matches the neoliberal framing category. As expected, the EU and IGO actors, the peak employer associations in France, Netherlands, and Switzerland, the experts in Switzerland, and the multinational corporations in France and the U.K. belong to this cluster. However, in the U.K., it also includes the left mainstream actors (public sector unions and

social democrats).

Since protectionist and traditional left approaches could be kept apart in the factor analysis, the third cluster is a combination of the two. Securing is seen in a positive light, while growth frames are related to the opposition to labor market reforms. In addition, the actors adhering to this cluster heavily emphasize securing aspects. The communists/radical socialists in Austria and the Netherlands (the only representatives from this party family that made it into the analyses), private sector unions in Austria and Germany, the radical populist parties in Austria, the public interest groups in Switzerland, and the small business associations in Germany and the Netherlands belong to this cluster. There are some few unexpected classifications such as the public administrations in Austria, the social democrats in France, as well as the experts in France and the U.K.

The last cluster (two) is mainly build by actors which have been expected to pursue a neoliberal approach. But beside their emphasis of growth-related arguments and the negative connotation of securing frames, which would have matched the neoliberal approach, they also perceive the growth aspects as negative. Namely, the public administrations from the Netherlands and the U.K., the Christian democrats/conservatives in France and Germany, the peak employer associations in France, the Netherlands, and the U.K., as well as the public enterprises in France and Switzerland.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this contribution was to explore the frame usage of the different actors engaging in the politics of employment relations in six west-European countries. In fact, as it becomes evident from the major labor market reforms currently occurring overall Europe, such as the Harz IV reform in Germany or the Universal Credit reform in the U.K., this policy domain is undergoing significant changes as a consequence of the transformation of socio-economic context induced by globalization, tertiarization and feminization.

The analyses frame emphasis and frame polarity results in two framing strategies, the first being a combination of the social-democratic “social protection” and “fairness” frames with the neo-mercantilist “protection” category. The second general frame instead is composed by the liberal “prosperity” and “economic freedom” frames with the neoliberal “intervention”. This broad picture of two competing framing patterns corresponds to the distinction between a political mainstream emphasizing economic growth and its challengers insisting on aspects of securing.

Moreover, given the different ideological traditions characterizing the European countries and according to the analytical framework of the comparative political economy literature, it is likely that the national pathways diverge with respect to the overall framing of de-regulating labor market reforms. This argument was tested against the literature, which instead claims that, overall, European countries converge on a neoliberal reform trajectory. Our empirical findings support the former view, and we could show that the countries in our sample, except for Austria, correspond to the typology developed on the basis of the VoC literature. More precisely, the results picture that in the CMEs Germany and France overall *securing frames* prevail, whereas in the traditional Liberal Market Economy (U.K.) growth frames are emphasized most. The small export-oriented economies Switzerland and the Netherlands are, according to our expectations, slightly more liberally oriented than the other CMEs. Only, the expectations for Austria could not be underpinned, this country results to be more liberal than expected.

Furthermore, the empirical results show that the frame usage also differs conspicuously between political actors depending both on their political orientation and on the clientele they serve, i.e. either the winners or losers of globalization and post-industrialization. On the one hand, left challengers such as communists/radical socialists and private sector unions as well as right challengers such as small business associations emphasize foremost securing

frames. On the other hand, right mainstream actors, such as public enterprises or public administration use foremost growth frames, accommodating the globalization winners.

Interestingly, the cluster analysis shows that depending on the country at stake not only social-democrats prefer a flexicurity approach but also liberal actors as for instance the multinational corporations in Austria, Germany and Switzerland as well as the Christian democrats/conservatives in Austria and the Netherlands. Furthermore, the neoliberal cluster comprehends not only the peak employer's associations in France, the Netherlands and Switzerland but also for instance the Labour party in the U.K. This rather diversified picture of cluster compositions is hence an indication that analyses not only of framing strategies but also of political preferences more generally should be cautiously conducted, since rather complex interaction patterns between actor preferences and country legacies exist.

The findings show as well that the differences are not only due to the type of frame emphasis but also on the *consistency* of the political actors frame use across countries. For instance Christian-democratic parties, for instance, are rather centrist, i.e. use both security and growth frames, but their polarity is very variable across countries. Liberal parties, instead, are very consistent across different countries. Here, one possible explanation could be that the strategic configuration of the party system has an influence on the emphasized framing, i.e. that political actors frame strategically and not corresponding to their intrinsic preferences.

Finally, similarly to testing the hypothesis whether country trajectories diverge, it could also be analyzed whether the degree of coordination with supra and international organizations, such as the European Union and its European Employment Strategy framework or the International Labour Office, influence the frame usage at the national level. In fact, the degree to which a country is integrated into the supranational lawmaking or the elaboration of international guidelines could also have a significant impact on the national employment relation framing.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1: Allocation of Justifications as Coded to the Frame Categories

| |
|--|
| <i>Prosperity</i> |
| Innovation; economic prosperity in general (of individuals, companies or sectors); wealth in general; free trade; liberalization; globalization; investments; profits; corporate management; competitiveness; research and development; economic progress. |
| <i>Economic freedom</i> |
| Economic self-interest; entrepreneurial success; blessing of capitalism and free markets; economic liberal ideas; freedom of economic activity in general; neo-liberal ideology; individual responsibility; entrepreneurial freedom; freedom of choice. |
| <i>Intervention</i> |
| Market failure; fiscal policy; bureaucracy; political efficiency; international relations; public goods (education, infrastructure etc.); interventionism in general; economic delinquency (clandestine employment, black market etc.); delinquency in general; security in general; corruption; political stability; inflation policy. |
| <i>Protection</i> |
| Protectionism; relocation abroad and foreign take-overs; loss of traditions; answer to globalization; benefit for domestic or local business; national identity; nationalism; national autonomy; national sovereignty; national interest in general; xenophobia; immigration. |
| <i>Social protection</i> |
| Employment protection; labor disputes and strikes; reducing unemployment; job quality; occupational health; social dumping; stakeholder interests; social security in general; consumer protection; individual well-being in general; labor relations and union agreements. |
| <i>Fairness</i> |
| Human dignity; democratic and participatory principles; equality of opportunity; poverty relief (as a moral duty); cultural diversity; gender equality; minority rights; exploitation; peace; solidarity with developing countries; public welfare; noncommercial values; humanitarian law; social justice in general; socialist ideology. |

Figure A.1: Scree Test for the Number of Factors with Respect to the Frame Polarities

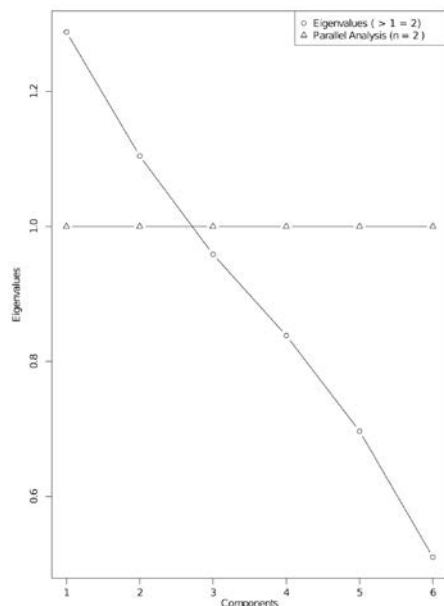
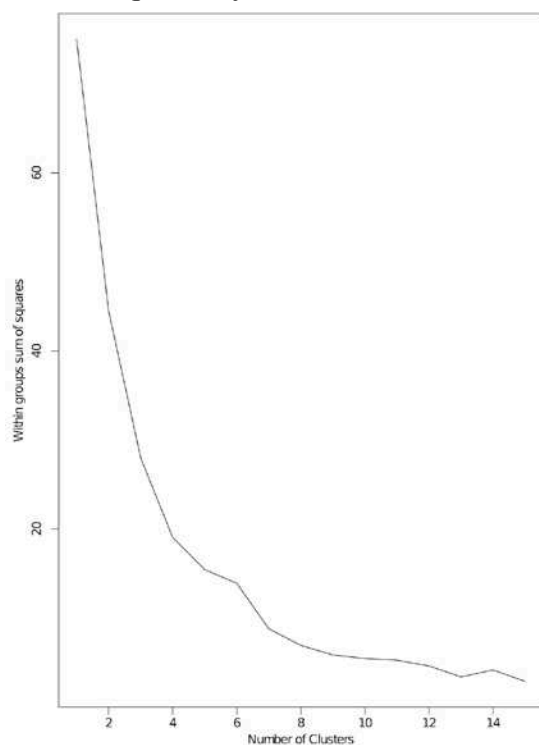


Table A.2: Results of OLS Regression on Emphasis of Securing

| | Estimates | Std. Err. | Pr(> t) |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Intercept | 0.347 | 0.104 | *** |
| <i>Actors (ref=Public administrations)</i> | | | |
| Christian democrats/conservatives | 0.075 | 0.120 | n.s. |
| Communists/radical socialists | 0.509 | 0.168 | *** |
| IGO and EU actors | -0.107 | 0.222 | n.s. |
| Experts | 0.115 | 0.120 | n.s. |
| Liberals | 0.134 | 0.168 | n.s. |
| Multinational corporations | -0.034 | 0.120 | n.s. |
| Peak employer assoc. | 0.021 | 0.120 | n.s. |
| Private sector unions | 0.448 | 0.132 | *** |
| Public interest groups | 0.314 | 0.168 | * |
| Public sector unions | 0.383 | 0.120 | *** |
| Radical populist right | -0.021 | 0.168 | n.s. |
| Small business assoc. | 0.270 | 0.145 | ** |
| Social democrats | 0.175 | 0.126 | n.s. |
| Public enterprises | -0.080 | 0.126 | n.s. |
| <i>Countries (ref=Austria)</i> | | | |
| Switzerland | -0.070 | 0.083 | n.s. |
| Germany | 0.128 | 0.091 | n.s. |
| France | 0.096 | 0.100 | n.s. |
| Netherlands | -0.046 | 0.090 | n.s. |
| U.K. | -0.212 | 0.090 | ** |
| N | 61 | | |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.44 | | |

Notes: F-statistic: 3.483 on 19 and 41 DF, p-value: 0.0004; Significance codes: ***=0.001, **=0.01, *=0.05.

Figure A.2: Kmeans Clustering: Within Groups
Sum of Squares by Number of Cluster



Notes: Selected model: 5 cluster.

Table A.3: Actor Classification by Cluster Analysis

| Cluster | Austria | France | Germany | Nether-lands | Switzer-land | U.K. | other |
|---|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 Flexicu- rity type 1 (+) sec (+) growth | chriscon, expert, multi, smallbus | – | admin, multi, socdem | chriscon, liberal, socdem, pubent | admin, chriscon, liberal, multi, radpop, smallbus | chriscon, expert, pubent | – |
| 2 Status quo (-) sec (-) growth | – | chriscon, peak, pubent | chriscon | admin, multi, peak, pubunion | pubent | admin, peak, pubint | – |
| 3 Left protec- tionist (+/-) sec (-) growth | admin, comsoc, privunion, radpop, pubent | expert, socdem | privunion, pubunion, smallbus | comsoc, pubunion, smallbus | pubint | expert | – |
| 4 Neo- liberal (-) sec (+) growth | peak | multi | peak | | expert, peak | multi, pubunion, socdem | IGO and EU |
| 5 Flexicu- rity type 2 (+/- sec) (+/-) growth | pubunion | pubunion | experts | – | privunion, pubunion, socdem | privunion | – |

Notes: Labels: admin=Public administrations, chriscon=Christian democrats/Conservatives, comsoc=Communists/Radical socialists, expert=Experts, IGO and EU=IGO and Eu actors, liberal=Liberals, multi=Multinational corporations, peak=Peak employer associations, pubent=Public enterprises, pubunion=Public sector union, privunion=Private sector union, radpop=Radical populist right, smallbus=Small business associations, socdem=Social democrats.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Conceptualization of Framing Categories

| <i>Ideology</i> | <i>Frame label</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Liberal | Prosperity | Emphasis of Innovation, economic performance and growth |
| | Economic freedom | Insisting on individual and entrepreneurial freedom |
| Neomercantilist | Intervention | Need for the regulation of markets |
| | Protection | Fostering traditional production and national wealth |
| Social Democratic | Social Security | Demanding redistribution and employment protection |
| | Fairness | Respect of social rights and egalitarian values |

Table 2: Framing Approaches

| | <i>Left</i> | <i>Right</i> |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| <i>Mainstream</i> | Flexicurity | Neoliberal |
| <i>Challengers</i> | Traditional left | Protectionist |

Table 3: CSA Coding example

| <p>“Mr. Blair has made economic reform the top priority of his presidency, hoping to make labor markets more flexible in order to tackle record unemployment and sluggish growth across the continent.” <i>(The Times, May 31 2005, Battle for the heart of Europe)</i></p> | | | |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Subject</i> | <i>Polarity</i> | <i>Issue</i> | <i>Frames</i> |
| Blair | +1 | Labor market reform | Social protection/Prosperity |

Table 4: Actor Classification as Used in the Analyses

| <i>Basic Categories</i> | <i>Refinements</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| Public authorities | IGO and EU actors Public administrations |
| Interest groups | Public sector unions Private sector unions Peak employer associations and white collar organizations Small business associations and farmer organizations |
| Party Families | Communists and radical socialists Greens Social democrats Liberals Christian democrats and conservatives Radical populist right |
| External actors | Multinational corporations Public enterprises Experts Public interest groups |

Table 5: Frame Emphasis and Frame Polarity

| | <i>Emphasis</i> | <i>Polarity</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Liberal</i> | 46.0 | 0.28 |
| Prosperity | 36.0 | 0.35 |
| Economic freedom | 10.0 | 0.04 |
| <i>Neomercantilist</i> | 19.8 | 0.21 |
| Intervention | 11.7 | 0.15 |
| Protection | 8.1 | 0.30 |
| <i>Social democratic</i> | 34.2 | -0.19 |
| Fairness | 6.9 | -0.23 |
| Social security | 27.3 | -0.18 |
| Total % / polarity | 100 | 0.11 |
| N | 2021 | |

Notes: Article and country weights applied. Framing = percentages; polarity = averages.

Table 6: Results of Factor Analysis on Frame Polarities on Employment Relations

| | Growth (Factor1) | Securing (Factor2) | Unique- ness |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Prosperity | 0.31 | 0.20 | 0.86 |
| Economic freedom | 0.54 | 0.19 | 0.68 |
| Intervention | 0.76 | 0.00 | 0.42 |
| Protection | 0.08 | 0.24 | 0.94 |
| Fairness | 0.02 | 0.56 | 0.69 |
| Social security | 0.24 | 0.68 | 0.48 |
| Eigenvalue | 1.93 | 1.17 | |
| Explained variance | 17% | 15% | |

Notes: Article and country weights applied for all calculations. N=

Figure 1: Frame Emphasis by Actor

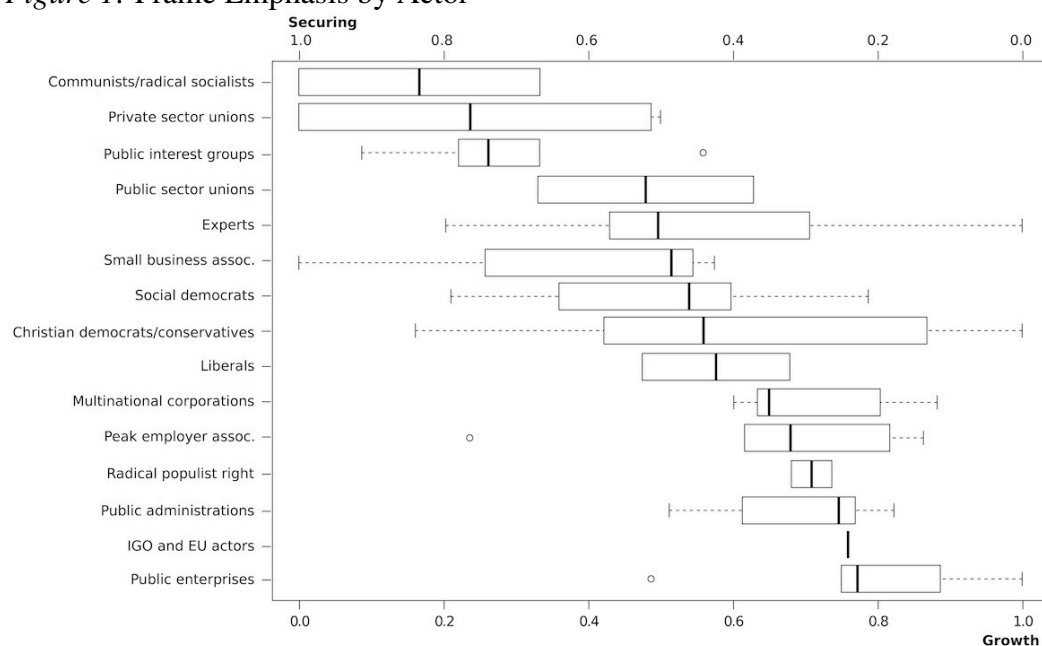


Figure 2: Frame Emphasis by Country

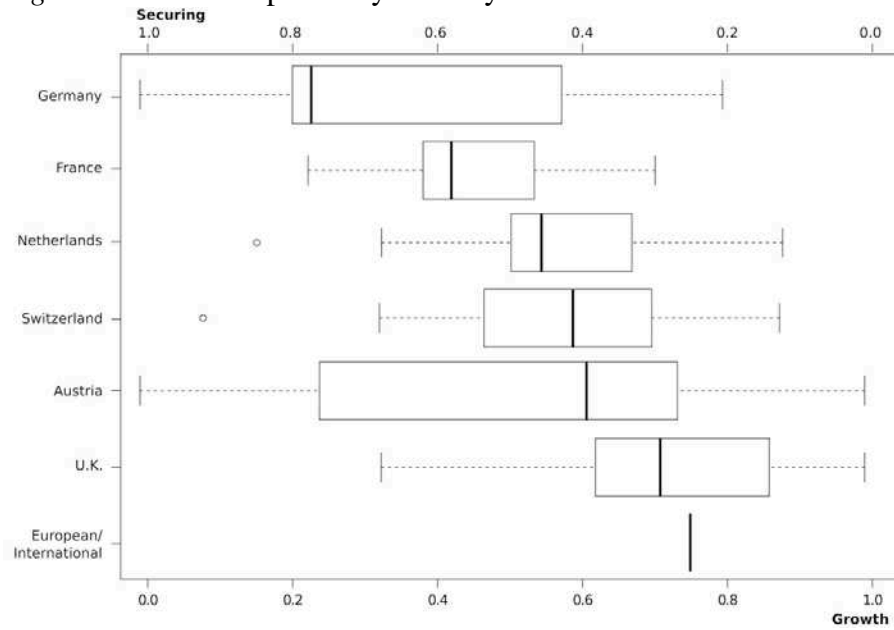
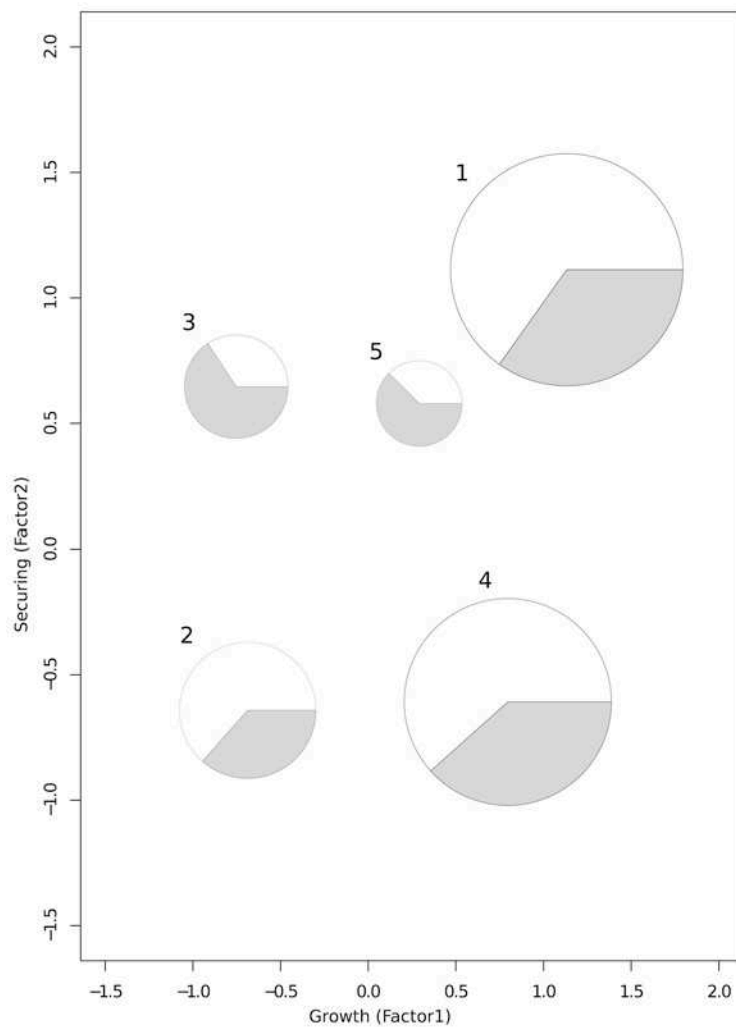


Figure 4: Frame Polarity (Factor Scores), Relative Importance and Frame Emphasis of Clusters



Notes: Pie chart centers=Polarity on the two Factors, Size of the pie charts=Relative frequency, Pie charts=Frame emphasis (white=Growth, grey=Securing).